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ABSTRACT

This brief paper for individuals interested in being qualified as educational interpreters for the deaf in Virginia provides basic information about educational interpreting and competency requirements of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program. It explains: the goal of educational interpreting; the role of the educational interpreter; competence requirements; standards established in Virginia; components of VQAS screenings; the VQAS written assessment; minimum competency for the written assessment; development of the VQAS performance assessment materials; criteria for the performance assessment (to demonstrate voice-to-sign, sign-to-voice, and interactive technical abilities); proficiency and diagnostic feedback; reliability and validity standards; VQAS assessment schedules and registration; candidate participation; training opportunities; and sources of additional information. (DB)

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Educational Interpreting and Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS):

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

VDDHH
WASHINGTON BUILDING CAPTIOL SQUARE
1100 BANK STREET 12TH FLOOR
RICHMOND, VA 23219-3640
804-225-2570 (V/T)
TOLL FREE 1-800-552-7917 (V/T)

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EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING
and
THE VIRGINIA QUALITY ASSURANCE SCREENING (VQAS):

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

GOAL OF EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING

Educational interpreting, as a profession, is designed to provide students who are deaf and hard of hearing an equal opportunity to learn in a mainstreamed educational program. By giving students exposure to the learning opportunities presented in classrooms, auditoriums, libraries, hallways, sports arenas, administrative offices, and any place where daily interactions occur, educational interpreters serve as the primary communication link and the language model for these students. The ultimate goal for these students, as for all students, is to provide them with the knowledge and tools to function independently in an adult world.

ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETER

The primary role of the educational interpreter is to facilitate communication in an educational setting. Interpreters convey the communication between individuals by interpreting or transliterating the message. Interpreting refers to the process of transferring the information from one language to another, typically from English to American Sign Language. Transliterating refers to the process of transferring information between two different forms of the same language. Cued Speech is a form of transliterating, as is transferring the information from spoken English to signed English. The term "interpreting" is often used generically to refer to both transliterating and interpreting.

VDDHH and DOE are sensitive to the inherent problem of an insufficient number of qualified interpreters to meet the ever-increasing demand and support the national trend to recognize educational interpreters as professionals, complete with the establishment of training strategies, job descriptions, and competitive salaries. It is recommended that additional roles and responsibilities assigned to educational interpreters be recognized as secondary when developing job descriptions and pay scales and should be scheduled for non-interpreting times. Likewise, educational interpreters who are hired to perform additional duties should be trained and endorsed, accordingly.

COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS

As recently as the early 1980s, there were no guidelines, requirements or laws which identified the qualifications of interpreters employed by public school systems. "Signers" and "interpreters" were frequently employed as teacher aides and,

generally, had minimal qualifications, such as having taken a course in sign language, being self-taught or growing up as a child of deaf adults. With the continued placement of children who are deaf or hard of hearing in local schools, the need for interpreters has grown, and the need to identify qualified personnel has become not only evident, but required.

STANDARDS ESTABLISHED IN VIRGINIA

The 1986 amendments to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act required personnel serving students with special needs to meet the highest of the minimum standards available in the state. In response to this federal mandate, the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) promulgated "Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Handicapped Children and Youth in Virginia," which identified the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Level III as the standard to be achieved by educational interpreters. Any Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certificate, except the Certificate of Deaf Interpretation, also satisfies the DOE requirement.

COMPONENTS OF VQAS

The VQAS is administered by the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) in accordance with the "Regulations Governing Interpreter Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing." VDDHH established the VQAS in 1989 to identify the competencies of potential sign language interpreters. Initially, the VQAS was designed to respond to the agency's Code mandate to coordinate and refer qualified interpreters throughout Virginia. Representatives from DOE were consulted to ensure that the process also satisfied the requirements of special education regulations. An assessment comprised of three major components (ethics, interpreting and transliterating) was devised and based on principles and practices frequently used in other assessment programs throughout the country. To further satisfy existing educational requirements, VDDHH implemented a Cued Speech component in 1991.

VQAS is offered in two phases: a Written Assessment and a Performance Assessment. Successful completion of both phases of the assessment process results in the awarding of a Screening Level in Interpreting, Transliterating, and/or Cued Speech, which is valid for three years.

VQAS WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

The Written Assessment is comprised of fifty multiple-choice questions which are designed to assess knowledge and application of the RID Code of Ethics, the guidelines which govern the interpreting profession. Questions incorporated into the assessment are based on professional trends, terminology and on real-life experiences of consumers and practicing interpreters.

Additional questions are currently being developed for standardization, field testing and incorporation into future assessments.

MINIMUM COMPETENCY FOR THE WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

To ensure the highest quality of professionalism, candidates must first demonstrate 90% competency on the Written Assessment before becoming eligible to participate in the second phase, the Performance Assessment. This 90% competency standard was recommended by consumers, parents, and interpreters during the original public comment period which established "The Regulations Governing Interpreting Services for the Hearing Impaired." Educational interpreters are required to demonstrate this requirement because screening credentials afford them the opportunity to work in a variety of situations where adherence to these ethical standards is imperative. Candidates which have demonstrated 90% competency on the written assessment have three years to obtain a VQAS level.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE VQAS PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT MATERIALS

Periodically a team of qualified raters convenes to review prospective materials for inclusion into each VQAS Performance Assessment. The models presented on the videotapes must meet certain criteria, such as moderate speaking pace, being representative of the language mode to be assessed, and being inclusive of the technical components exemplified in the process of interpreting or transliterating. Once selected, the final materials are edited for the preferred assessment format and presented to interpreters with varying skill levels to ensure that a range of abilities can be demonstrated.

CRITERIA FOR THE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

During the performance assessment, the candidate interprets and transliterates six videotaped segments to demonstrate voice-to-sign, sign-to-voice and interactive technical abilities.

1) Voice-to-Sign - the ability to convey the message in the appropriate communication mode as presented by a person who is hearing;

2) Sign-to-Voice - the ability to convey the message in spoken English as presented by a person who is deaf or hard of hearing; and

3) Interactive - the ability to function in the role of the interpreter between persons who use different communication modes.

Candidates who are able to convey 50 to 100 percent of the overall meaning and intent of the message in each of three categories are awarded a screening level in Transliterating (manually-coded English), Interpreting (American Sign Language), and/or Cued Speech. **The minimum competency for the VQAS Screening Levels are:**

Level I - 50% accuracy
Level II - 65% accuracy
Level III - 80% accuracy
Level IV - 95% accuracy

The screening level awarded to a candidate is not based on an average score of the three categories, but is based on the lowest proficiency rating received in each of three categories. For example, a candidate who receives 66% on Expressive Transliterating, 51% on Receptive Transliterating and 67% on Interactive Transliterating would receive a VQAS Transliterating Screening - Level I, since the lowest of the three scores is 51% accuracy. A candidate may be awarded different levels for Interpreting, Transliterating, and/or Cued Speech. The screening level awarded is valid for three years from the date of the notification letter.

The 50% minimum requirement for a Screening Level I was adopted to enable novice interpreters the opportunity to identify their current level of functioning and perform services in limited settings which would facilitate their professional and technical growth.

PROFICIENCY AND DIAGNOSTIC FEEDBACK

In addition to proficiency scores, diagnostics are provided, within 90 working days, to the candidate which delineate specific areas of developmental need, as well as outline the strengths demonstrated on the day assessed. Administrators who hire and schedule interpreters can better meet the needs of the individual students by knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the interpreters. In order for school administrators or other employers, to receive information on a candidate, a release form available from VDDHH must be signed by the candidate.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY STANDARDS

The assessment process is administered, reviewed and monitored by VDDHH personnel although the various rating and scoring components of the Performance Assessment are completed by trained raters.

Raters are trained to assess selected criteria relative to the particular materials selected. Raters are also monitored to ensure that discrepancies and biases do not occur which may alter the results of any candidate. The process was reviewed and approved by the Office of the Attorney General prior to implementation.

Educational Interpreting and VQAS

During September of 1992, Dr. Jack Warner, a professional psychometrician from Colorado, was hired by VDDHH to determine the validity of the VQAS. Dr. Warner found the VQAS to be a fair and valid assessment tool and offered recommendations, which have been implemented, for continued improvement and validity.

VDDHH also solicits feedback from candidates regarding the process and implements changes whenever feasible. In response to feedback received from candidates, for example, the results of the Written Assessment have been simplified and are now scored immediately following administration. This allows candidates, who are eligible, to participate in the Performance Assessment on the same day, pending seating availability or the current assessment cycle.

VQAS ASSESSMENT SCHEDULES AND REGISTRATION

The VQAS is offered by VDDHH generally on the third Friday of each month in the Richmond central office. As in the past, VDDHH will continue to make every effort to conduct screenings in remote regions around the state when requested.

Candidates are scheduled in the order that written registrations are received. Spaces may be limited. To determine if space is still available for a certain assessment site or date, call VDDHH at 1-800-552-7917 or 804-371-7891.

CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

Candidates for VQAS should submit a Candidate Profile form to the VQAS Coordinator to notify VDDHH of their intent to be screened and to ensure they are notified of all assessment-related information. The Assessment Registration form is required for submitting the registration fee and selecting a specific assessment site and date. Registration fees must be paid in advance, fees and forms must be postmarked no later than three weeks prior to the date of the assessment. Fees may only be paid in the form of a cashier's check or a money order. Personal checks, cash, or credit cards will not be accepted. **As of July 1, 1994, the fee for the Written Assessment is $20.00, and the fee for the Performance Assessment is $80.00. Registration fees are non-refundable, but can be applied to future assessment dates.**

Candidates are encouraged to wait at least six months before retaking any portion of the assessment to allow for sufficient time to develop their skills, as well as for the development of additional assessment materials.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The need for training has been identified as the primary problem facing interpreters currently employed in the educational setting. VDDHH and DOE encourage each local education agency to support such training efforts and to take advantage of the opportunities available in Virginia:

VDDHH may provide **training and consultation** to educational interpreters and administrators. Information about training opportunities currently being offered throughout Virginia and neighboring states is also available. For more information contact Bruce Sofinski, at 1-800-552-7917 or (804) 371-7891.

DOE offers **guidelines** regarding the employment of qualified interpreting personnel **and funds for training** opportunities for educational interpreters. For additional information, contact Dr. Phil Bellefleur, Associate of Hearing Impaired Programs, at (804) 225-2363.

VRID (Virginia Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) provides opportunities for professional development at the state level and through local affiliates. Contact Cat Clough, VRID President, at (804) 672-6734 or the local affiliates for more information.

To order a copy of **Educational Interpreters in Virginia Public Schools: Factors Affecting Supply, Demand and Training, October, 1993, (RFP 92-69)**, send a check or money order for $4.23 and your mailing address to:

Virginia Department of Education
Office of Public Affairs - 25th Floor
PO Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23216-2120

For more information about VQAS contact VDDHH, at 1-800-552-7917 or (804) 225-2570.

This document was prepared by the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing effective 5/94 and is subject to change.